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ABSTRACT

Journal writing can be used as a tool for the assessment of teaching while allowing students to have an active and expressive voice in their learning. Journal writing provides an excellent interactive format in which students can more freely express their understanding or lack of understanding of the subject matter. The entries also frequently have a true sense of dialogue and can be extremely "vocal." The journal is an excellent place for brainstorming, for generating topics for papers, and for the selection of individual or group projects. Journal writing is not a new idea, but there are applications for the speech communication curriculum such as: (1) a public speaking teacher having the students record their expectations of the class and their fears and then using the journals to structure a lecture about the goals and the common anxieties of the class; and (2) an oral interpretation teacher having students record their expectations of their own performances before a speaking assignment and their evaluations of their performances after the speeches are given. (RS)

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JOURNAL WRITING ACROSS THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM

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For years, the practice of journal writing has been emphasized, encouraged, debated, and defended by English departments. Strategies for teaching writing and for teaching thinking through writing have been advocated by writers such as Dan Kirby, Tom Liner, Ken Macrorie and Toby Fulweiler, to namea few. With the impact of Writing Across the Curriculum efforts, it is hardly surprising that journal writing has been used in classes as diverse as physics, music appreciation, and woodworking. My experience with journal writing in speech communication classes has made me a believer in journal use across our curriculum and an advocate of this multi-faceted teaching tool.

Also called "logs," "commonplace books," "day books," or "idea books," journals allow students to use a form of expressive writing rarely encouraged in academe. This personal, "I" centered writing technique is generally ignored or discouraged in favor of the more traditional "transactional" writing form, which communicates information. (Transactional writing is objective, conventional, impersonal, and correct according to writing standards.) Writing is generally taught as an end, not a means of learning, solely as a way of repeating rather than creating ideas. As Fulwiler says, "Few curricula recognize...that writing can have an equally important role in generating knowledge...as [it can] in communicating it."[1]

We learn by making language, and when we make that language visible in the form of writing, we are able to examine our thinking and know

what we know. This treatment of writing as as tool of inquiry frees the inner voice, the expressive persona, to create and manipulate thought. Failure to nurture the inner voices of students is often a by-product of large lecture classes and routine regurgitation by students of factual material. The student rarely finds an opportunity to express, in a subjective manner, his/her reactions and feelings about course content but is expected to present information in a well-prescribed impersonal format.

When I started using journals in my Nonverbal Communication classes eight years ago, I was primarily interested in the recorded observations of nonverbal behaviors, but I soon noticed a much greater potential for journal use. With more study on my part, more clarification for the students, and some trial and error, I was able to open a different line of communication, a way of listening closely to honest talk and responding with understanding. Fulwiler defines an academic journal as "a place to practice writing and thinking. It differs from a diary in that it should not be merely a personal recording of the day's events. It differs from your class notebook in that it should not be merely an objective recording of academic data. Think of your journal rather as a personal record of your educational experience, including this class, other classes, and your current extracurricular life."[2] With additional instruction, I was able to convince students that what I wanted from them was an honest, personal appraisal of class content and methodology without the terrifying fear of a letter grade.

Because many students are reluctant to speak in class, it is often difficult for a teacher to know what has registered and what has not.

The journal provides an excellent interactive format in which students more freely express their understanding or lack of understanding of subject matter. For instance, in Introduction to Speech Communication classes, I ask students to tell me what they do and do not understand. Here is an interesting response to that request:

> What is it that I think I understand about communication? I understand that most of what I know about it I didn't learn from a book but from personal experiences. What I really don't understand is the irreversible aspect of communication. I think if you are really communicating, you will be able to go back and ask forgiveness for what you said. In legal circles there is "striking from the record". It <u>can</u> be taken back. I can forget and forgive things that cause me harm all the time. If I couldn't, I would have to stay at home in my closet to avoid the harm that words can do. Like the book of James says--the tongue is like fire--but there is an extinguisher!*

Obviously I needed to explain more clearly the concept of irreversibility. But I knew someone understood when I read this entry:

> I totally understand about why communication is irreversable (sic). The easiest way to understand that sentence is to have a fight with your girlfriend.

*Journal entries are included with permission of students. Except for misspellings, I have reproduced all entries as received.

Certain journal entries offer more clarity than answers to examination questions. Perhaps because they feel under less pressure when journal writing than when taking tests, students are more willing to apply theory. For instance, this entry is far more enlightening than the usual explanation I receive of the axiom:

> One cannot not communicate. This axiom strikes me as really unusual. I have never stopped to think about this, but the more I think about it, the better I see why this is true. Every behavior I exhibit communicates some kind of message, whether I intend for it to or not. I never thought that when I was standing in an elevator, staring straight ahead, that I was communicating. But after a further look, I see that I was sending a message of "do not bother me." When I am acting a fool, I could be sending the message that I am immature and cannot carry on an intelligent conversation. This all can be very frightening. Now that I know of this axiom I find myself thinking about what kind of message I am sending. I think about my actions a little more. I never expected this class to reveal things about myself to me. This is why I find this axiom unusual.

Self revelation is the very essence of the study of intrapersonal communication, and in studying a unit on intrapersonal, I have students write letters to themselves. Some are funny; others are self-conscious; others appear to be wishful thinking.

Dear Me,

If it wasn't raining outside it would be a perfect day. It is nice and warm for a change and I am going to try to get all my studying done early so I can play some basketball. I feel great and there is this girl that I like and she seems to be giving me positive feedback. She really is beautiful and I really would love to go out with her. Non-verbal communication is really strong between us. She seems to sit close to me in class and eye-contact is evident. I hope things work out.

Your friend,
Scott

But not only do these examples of self-talk suggest secret wishes; they frequently result in self-criticism and reproach.

Dear Sue,

I know that you are tired and sick of school, but you have papers to write, reports to give, and journals to do. What are you thinking about! Get out of bed and study! You have no time for sleep or socializing so get up and get to the library. I know the library gives you headaches, but you have to go! You cannot hang around your apartment because you will not get anything done.

You need to quit eating so much junk and exercise more often. I thought you gave candy bars up for lint (sic) but didn't I see you eating one the other day?

This has been a very hard quarter for you and you still have a lot of hard work left to do "so get to it" as your

dad would say.

You have become very lazy and need a good shot of your seeker self to go out and get things done. Also, clean your room! You can't even begin to study in a messy room! Well, goodnight. Have fun studying!

Your consciousness! (sic)

P.S. Write your thank-you notes today!

Parents would be proud that we are teaching such responsibility But notice the reference to seeker self. In the reader for our Introduction to Speech Communication course, we include an article from Sheehy's Passages[3] and an explanatory essay on the Ambrester-Strause model of intrapersonal communication.[4] The readings introduce several "selves" - - seeker, merger, primitive, ideal, conceptualizing, and socialized. After discussing the Ambrester-Strause "internal wrangle" between primitive, socialized, and conceptualizing selves, I ask students to write their own inner debates. Here is an example.

Situation: My best friend's girl is coming on to me. She is good-looking, and he ain't around. She is drunk.

Socialized self: Don't take advantage of her.

Primitive self: Oh, go on. You deserve to.

Socialized self: You won't be able to live with yourself.

Primitive self: It's her fault. Look at her, she's asking for it.

Conceptualizing self: Think of the reprocusions (sic).

Primitive self: Go ahead, you can deny everything.

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Primitive self: Go ahead, you can deny everything.

Socialized self: Look at what will happen to your reputation with other women.

This is a case when my ideal self would win, because what I would strive for in this situation I always achieve. Ideally, I would help her out, and try to save her the humility. (sic)

Students write about the choices between study and extracurricular activities, dieting and bingeing, attending class or sleeping. These internal debates are generally written with a great deal of imagination and a true tone of credibility.

Intralogue - "To Write or Not to Write"

Situation - I just got off work early; my homework is caught up and I'd really rather go to bed early. But, I need to make a journal entry because she is going to look at these on Friday and I will not have time tomorrow.

Scene - I'm sitting up in bed with pen in hand and journal in my lap.

Primitive Self: I'm tired, let's just lay down and turn off the light.

Socialized Self: You just can't think of anything to write so you want to sleep.

Primitive Self: No, that's not it, I just have been working every night and I need the nap time.

Conceptualizing Self: Well, why don't you then? It

seems reasonable to me.

Socialized Self: You better not touch that light or you'll regret not having made at least one entry since she gave us so many assignments!

Primitive Self: You think of something; I'm getting delerious (sic).

Socialized Self: I know. I'll write about this situation. That way we can go to sleep.

Conceptualizing Self: Sounds good to me! Let's do it.

Primitive Self: And hurry, would you!

Journal entries have a true sense of dialogue--a real urgency "to tell it like it is." With ample punctuation, parenthetical expression, under-scoring and capitalization, journal entries become extremely "vocal."

> Ever since we've started talking about listening, and how bad we are at it, I've been observing my girlfriends when we talk. My boyfriend is out of town, and I'm with my girlfriends constantly. One thing I've noticed is how everyone jumps in; they want to be heard so bad they interrupt. The Scary thing is that I Do it too!! And that is the rudest thing in the world to me!! One of my friends, no names (she might read this or something) is especially bad because she loves to argue and her opinion cannot be disputed. It is, in essence, <u>fact</u>, not opinion. My other girlfriend is just about to kill her over this. It is funny, but very annoying at times. I DON'T want to be like this!!

What can I do?? Please help me, Dr. Julian, because I don't want to get on everyone's nerves and be plotted against. All suggestions will be greatly appreciated.

Thanks!

One must establish at the beginning of journal assignments what is off-limits. One must insist that the journal not be overly personal and intimate in its details. Asking for advice is not unusual in journal writing, and as long as the advice sought has to do with some element of speech communication or information pertinent to the study, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify and/or extend classroom and textbook study. (I try to establish from the beginning that I am not Dr. Ruth and do not intend to deal in that kind of advice.) Marginal notes in answer to queries or meeting with students in conference to discuss their questions have been beneficial. It is not always possible to use "dialogue journals" because of class size, but this particular type of journal allows extended conversation, written rather than spoken, between student and teacher. Dialogue journals differ from traditional personal journals because the teacher responds at length to student entries rather than with brief marginal notes. This form works extremely well in upper-division or graduate courses.

Journal writing in class stimulates class discussion. Starting a class period with five minutes of journal writing about the assignment and having the writings read aloud or taking a break in the middle of class to have students transcribe their impressions are good ways to test a variety of perceptions. This method of

asking for feedback is less threatening than a pop quiz and allows contributions from the entire class.

Kirby and Liner claim that the journal is an indispensable tool in helping students expand their "cognitive and verbal repertory."[5] The journal serves as an excellent repository for vocabulary building. Entries such as **taxonomy**, **oxymoron**, and **assignation** appear in lists of new vocabulary I find in journals.

In her book Communicating With Myself: A Journal, Jacquelyn Carr suggests several exercises for adding precision and clarity to language. One activity asks the writer to go through his/her journal and circle abstract, general and emotional words and replace them with more concrete, specific, and denotative terms.[6] Labels, stereotypes, cliches, and jargon can be flagged and analyzed. Journal entries offer unlimited possibilities for the study of language use.

The journal is an excellent place for brainstorming, for generating topics for research and/or papers, and for selection of individual or group projects. In preparation for symposia, I have students identify group member types (e.g., energizer, blocker, leader, procedural technician, harmonizer). One student wrote, "Many people (in my group) wanted to be dominators. This is a negative stereotype because it causes problems for the group. Thank God we had a harmonizer." This entry suggests that she was applying her knowledge of the group's makeup. In recognizing "types," and specific typical behaviors, group members are able to function more efficiently and eliminate potential problems.

The purpose for which I first used journals in Nonverbal

Communication class has expanded. I assign a field experience paper in which the student documents existing theory on a given nonverbal modality (e.g., facial expression, kinesics, proxemics) and matches his/her observations of that particular nonverbal classification with the theory. Deciding on which modality to concentrate had always been a problem. However, when looking through student journals, I realized that most students selectively observed one modality more than others. By pointing this out to the student, I am able to focus his/her attention on a specific form of nonverbal communication. Careful observation and recording of journal entries will identify individual selective perceptions and attitudes as well as tracing class trends and assessments of class goals.

What I find most useful and most rewarding about journal use is getting to know students in new and exciting ways. My perceptions are formed by their looks, demeanor, where they sit in class and whether or not they contribute to class discussion. I am often reminded by journal entries that my assessments may be flawed. Last year, I taught a student who appeared to be haughty, angry, and insolent. She frowned constantly, sat in the seat right under my nose, and appeared to be jeering at everything I said. After a discussion of the Johari window, I asked the class to apply its principles to any communication problems they saw in themselves. My frowning student wrote this:

> I am writing this to myself, but I'm really not sure what to say. I guess I'll start by pointing out my communication problem. I tend to keep to myself and

not act very friendly. The reason for this is not that I don't want to talk to people, but rather because I am shy and quiet. People tend to observe me and term me conceited. I've had a hard time dealing with this. I don't mean to give the impression that I am too good for everyone. I guess it's true that you cannot not communicate. I never even realized I was communicating something to others by not speaking with them. I need to learn to be more careful about the way I appear in public. I've been speaking with my friends and asking them how I can improve my problem because they are with me often and they can see things about me that I can't even see. I guess this is my "blind" window.

Not only does Lisa demonstrate that she understands the concepts; she begins to apply them. More importantly, I am reminded that I must not prejudge and must be aware that my students are "real" people.

And I am constantly alerted that my "blind pane" might need shrinking. I never cease to be amazed at how many strange mannerisms I have; how often I to move to the right side of the lecturn when I'm on one of my tangents; what my dress and posture reflect about how I feel on a particular day; what idiosyncratic behaviors I've developed this term. But I profit by this kind of disclosure, for if I am to ask students to trust me with their observations of themselves and their peers, it is to be expected (and appreciated) that they not be fearful of being candid.

Journal writing is not a new idea, but there are new applications we may find in the speech communication curriculum. A colleague has her students in the public speaking class record on the first day what they expect of the class and what they most fear. She uses those entries to structure her lecture about the goals and common anxieties of the class. She has students record their reactions to peer evaluations, and she asks students to record in journals their expectations of their own performances before a speaking assignment and their evaluations of their performances after the speeches are given. Another colleague uses journals in oral interpretation to analyze the literary merits of the works performed in her classes. And another colleague plans to use the journal as a learning tool in his speech anxiety classes. Group, interpersonal, organizational, and persuasion classes might well find a use for the journal.

Journal evaluation is not easy. It's time-consuming and often frustrating, for we must resist the temptation to mark misspellings, punctuation errors, and incorrect grammatical structures. It's often boring, for all student journals are not written as compellingly as Thoreau's. But it is worthwhile. By using focused journal writing, we have a tool for an assessment of our teaching while allowing our students to have an active, and expressive voice in their learning.

ENDNOTES

[1]Toby Fulwiler, Teaching With Writing, (Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton-Cook, 1987), p. 33.

[2]Fulwiler, p. 33.

[3]Gail Sheehy, "Breast to Breakaway," Passages (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976),pp.41-51.

[4]Marcus L. Ambrester and Glynis H. Strause, A Rhetoric of Interpersonal Communication (Prospect Heights, New Jersey: Waveland Press, 1984), pp. 101-120.

[5]Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, Inside Out (Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton-Cook, 1981), p.35.

[6]Jacquelyn B. Carr, Communicating With Myself: A Journal (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1984), p. 77.

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